

‘Òran Imrich’ / ‘Imrich nan Eileanach’: a PEI Gaelic song-poem from the 19th century concerning *errance* and *enracinement* poised between artifice and orality.

Dr Iain S MacPherson
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig – UHI

Calum Bàn Buchanan (or *MacMhannain*, yet whose descendants though are known as Buchanans to this day) left the Isle of Skye on board the totemic emigrant ship *The Polly* under the aegis of the mass migration event led by Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk (‘Lord Selkirk in PEI usage) landing in Prince Edward Island in August, 1803.

The song-poem is first collected in 1883 and then published in the Cape Breton Gaelic newspaper (1895) *Mac-Talla* in addition to Alexander MacLean Sinclair’s work as follows:

Mac-Talla III, 41, (1895) p. 8;

Mac-Talla XI, 10, (1902) p. 79 ;

The Gaelic Bards 1765 – 1825, pps. 81-85 (A MacLean Sinclair)

Its twentieth-century publication is in Sister Margaret MacDonell’s magisterial *The Emigrant Experience* (MacDonell 1982: 105-113); and it’s this one I’ve based my work on though comparing it throughout with its two *Mac-Talla* publications.

The MacLean Poet who was on the bank/ Am bard MacIlleathain a bh’ air a’ bhruaich: Mac-Talla VII, 11 (1898) p. 87: ‘Gearan air America’ / ‘A Complaint about America’



Description of the composition of the song-poem as it appeared in Mac-Talla: 14/11/1902

Rinneadh an t-òran seo le Calum Bàn MacMhanainn¹ (sic), aon dhen luchd-imrich air an t-soitheach ainmeil 'Polly' a sheòl à Port Rìgh san Eilean Sgitheanach toiseach an t-samhraidh, 1803, agus a leag an t-acair ann am bàgh Orwell, an Eilean a' Phrionnsa, air an 18mh latha de chiad mhìos an fhoghair sa bhliadhna sin, le mu thimcheall ochd ceud luchd-imrich. Tha an t-òran a' toiseachadh le bhith a' toirt cunntas orra fàgail acarsaid Phort Rìgh, agus an seòladh cunnartach am measg

chreagan is eileanan air taobh an ear agus tuath an Eilein Sgitheanaich gus an d' fhuair i sàbhailte gu cuan mòr. Tha e ri thuigsinn on òran gun robh làimhseachadh an t-soithich air earbsa ris a' chuid bu chomasaiche 's a b' eòlaiche measg an luchd-imrich fhad 's a bha feum orra. Tha e a' cur sìos gu cruaidh air an-ìochdmhorachd a' bhàillidh, agus a' toirt comhairl' air daoine teicheadh o ain-tighearnas nan uachdaran. Tha e a' crìochnachadh le bhith a' moladh Eilean a' Phrionnsa do dhream aig am biodh sùil ri tighinn a-nall.

Bhatar am beachd ùine mhòr gu robh an t-òran seo air chall, ach sa bhliadhna 1883, air an 29mh là dhen Mhàrt, fhuair e o bheul seann duine², aois ceithir fichead 's a còig, a dh'ionnsaich e an làithean òige on ùghdar. Tha e ro choltach gu robh am fonn air a dhèanamh le aon de Chloinn 'Ic Criomain. Tha 'n t-òran na shamhladh fìor air a' Ghàidhlig dhùthchasaich, mar a bha i air a labhairt san Eilean Sgitheanach còrr is ceud bliadhna air ais; oir cha b' urrainn an t-ùghdar aon chuid sgrìobhadh no leughadh.

Chaidh an t-òran a sgrìobhadh le Eòghann MacLaomainn, 's a chur gu MAC-TALLA san earrach, 1895, le "Murchadh Cam." Tha sinn aig an àm seo ga chur an clò arithist, air iarrtas cuid de leughadairean an Eilean a' Phrionnsa.

¹ See Margaret MacDonell, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*: http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/macmhanainn_calum_ban_5E.html

² According to Dr Tiber Falzett it's a certain Ruairidh Mòr MacLeòid the old man that gave this song-poem to Ewen Lamont.

'Imrich nan Eileanach'
le Calum Bàn MacMhannain (sic)
a-mach à *The Emigrant Experience*
(MacDonell 1982: 105-113)

1)

An àm togail dhuinn fhìn
Mach o chala Phort Rìgh,
'S iomadh aon a bh' air tìr 's iad brònach;
Iad ag amharc gu dlùth
Null 's an sùil air an luing,
'S ise gabhail a-null gu Rònaigh;
Thuir MacPhàid às an Dìg,
'S e ag èigheach rium fhìn,
"S ann a laigheas i sìos gu Tròdaigh;
'S biodh am fear as fheàrr tìr
Nis na shuidh' air an stiùir
Gus an tèid i os cionn an t-Sòthain.

2)

Eilean eil' ann da rèir
Agus Sgeir na Ruinn Gèir,
'S bidh muir air a' bhèist an-còmhnaidh;
Tha cnap eil' ann no dhà,
'S ann dhiubh sin Clach nan Ràmh,
'S Bogha Ruadh tha fo Àird 'Ic Thòrlain;
Leac na Buinne seo shuas
'S Rubh' an Aiseig ri cluais,
Mol a' Mhaide 's e cruaidh le dòirneig;
Thoir an aire gu dlùth
Cumail àrd os an cionn -
Seachain sruth Rubh' Hùnaid, 's mòr e."

3)

Dh'èirich soirbheas on tuath
Dhuinn os cionn Fladaigh Chuain,
'S ann a ghabhadh i 'n uair sin òran;
I a' siubhal gu luath,
'S i a' gearradh ma cluais,
Dol a ghabhail a' chuain 's i eòlach.
Thug mi sùil às mo dhèidh
Null air Rubh' a' Chùirn Lèith
Is chan fhaca mi fhèin ach ceò air;
Sin nuair labhair MacPhàil,
'S e ag amharc gu h-àrd:
"S mòr mo bheachd gur h-e bàrr an Stòrr
e."

4)

Moire, 's minig a bha
Mise treis air a sgàth
Ann an Rìg, 's gum b' e 'n t-àite bhò e;
Nuair a thigeadh am Màrt
Bhiodh an crodh anns a' Chàrn,
'S bhiodh na luibhean co-fhàs ri neòinean;
Bhiodh an luachair ghorm ùr
Nios a' fàs anns a' bhùrn
Fo na bruthaichean cùbhra', bòidheach;
Bhiodh na caoraich da rèir
Ann ri mire 's ri leum,
'S iad a' breith anns a' Chèit' uain òga.

5)

Thàinig maighstir às ùr
Nis a-staigh air a' ghrunnd,
Sin an naidheachd tha tùrsach, brònach;
Tha na daoine às a' falbh,
'S ann tha 'm maoin an dèidh searg,
Chan eil mart aca dh'fhalbhas mòinteach;
Chuireadh cuid dhiubh sa mhàl,
'S fhuair cuid eile dhiubh 'm bàs,
'S tearc na dh'fhuirich a' làthair beò
dhiubh:
Ciod a bhuinig dhomh fhìn
Bhith a' fuireach san tìr
O nach coisinn mi nì air brògan.

6)

'S ann a thèid mi thar sàil,
'S ann a leanas mi càch,
Feuch a' faigheamaid àite-còmhnaidh;
Gheibh sinn fearann às ùr
'S e ri cheannach à grunnd,
'S cha bhi sgillinn ri chunntas oirnn dheth;
'S math dhuinn fasgadh nan craobh
Seach na bruthaichean fraoich
Bhiodh a-muigh ann an aodann Ghròbain;
Air na leacan lom, fuar,
Nuair a thigeadh am fuachd,
Sin an t-astar bu bhuaine mòinteach.

7)

Moire 's fhada dhuinn fhìn
Rinn sinn fuireach san tìr,
Ged a thogamaid nì gu leòr ann,
'S iomadh dosgainn is call

Thigeadh orra nan àm,
 Chuireadh seachad feadh bheann ri ceò
 iad.
 Ged a readh'maid gu fèill,
 'S ged a reiceamaid treud,
 'S ged a gheibheamaid fèich gu leòr air,
 Thig am Bàillidh mun cuairt
 Leis na sumanaidh chruaidh,
 'S bheir e h-uile dad uainn dheth
 còmhladh.

8)

B' e sin fitheach gun àgh
 Tha air tighinn an-dràst',
 'S e na Bhàillidh an àite 'n Leòdaich,
 Umaidh àrdanach, cruaidh,
 'S e gun iochd ris an tuath,
 E gun taise, gun truas, gun tròcair;
 'S beag an t-iongnadh e fhèin
 Bhith gun chàirdeas fon ghrèin,
 Oir chan aithne dhomh fhèin cò 's eòl dha,
 Ach an Caimbeulach ruadh
 O thaobh Asaint o thuath;
 'S nam bu fada fear buan dhe sheòrsa!

9)

Ach ma thèid thu gu bràth
 A-null thairis air sàil,
 Thoir mo shoraidh gu càirdean eòlach,
 Thoir dhaibh cuireadh gun dàil

Iad a theicheadh on mhàl,
 'S iad a thighinn cho tràth 's bu chòir
 dhaibh;
 Is nam faigheadh iad àm
 'S dòigh air tighinn a-nall,
 'N sin cha bhiodh iad an taing
 MhicDhòmhnaill;
 'S ann a gheibheadh iad àit'
 Anns an cuireadh iad bàrr,
 'S ro-mhath chinneadh buntàta 's eòrn'
 ann.

10)

'S e seo Eilean an àigh
 Anns a bheil sinn an-dràst',
 'S ro-mhath chinneas dhuinn blàth air pòr
 ann.
 Bidh an coirc' ann a' fàs,
 Agus cruithneachd fo bhlàth,
 Agus tuirneap is càl is pònair,
 Agus siùcar nan craobh
 Ann ri fhaighinn gu saor,
 'S bidh e againn na chaoban mòra;
 'S ruma dathte, dearg, ùr
 Anns gach bothan is bùth,
 Cheart cho pailt ris a' bhùrn ga òl ann.³

³ Link to recording by Calum MacLean of the
 Rev Norman MacDonald singing and
 discussing the song-poem:
<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26>

[75?backURL=/en/searchByPerson%3Fpersonid%3D568%26name%3DRev.%20Norman%20%20MacDonald%26page%3D2%23track_2675](http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchByPerson%3Fpersonid%3D568%26name%3DRev.%20Norman%20%20MacDonald%26page%3D2%23track_2675)

'The Emigration of the Islanders'

Calum Bàn Buchanan

c. 1803

Translated by Iain S MacPherson for *An Tarsainn*, the 2003 PEI-Isle of Skye bicentennial commemoration of the 1803 sailing of the *Polly* and the Earl of Selkirk's Gaelic-speaking emigrants to British North America.

In memory of Harry Baglole, UPEI

1)

When the time came for us to sail out of Portree harbour, the shore was lined with downcast folk, eyes riveted on the ship as it made for Rona. MacFadyen from Digg called out to me: "Now she'll head down to Trodday; so have the best hand take the helm, at least till she gets above Sothain."

2)

"Then there's another island just like it, and Sgeir na Ruinn Gèir: that beast is always covered by sea. And another nook or two, like Clach nan Ràmh and Bogha Ruadh under Àird 'Ic Thòrlain. Then Leac na Buinne further on, and Rubh' an Aiseig close by: and Mol a' Mhaide pebbled hard. Be very careful, keep well above them, and give the Rubh' Hùnais current a miss: it's pounding."

3)

A fair wind rose from the north as we sailed past Fladaigh Chuain, and the ship started to sing: hummed along, tacked round, and took to the wide-open, intimate sea. I looked behind me, over to Rubh' a' Chùirn Lèith, and saw nothing: nothing but mist. So MacPhail glanced up and said, "I'm quite sure it's the summit of Stòrr."

4)

Mother Mary, how often in Rigg I was under its shade: such a place for the cows. In March the cattle would be in Càrn, the grass keeping pace with the daisies. Fresh green rushes would rise up in clear water under sweet-smelling, beautiful banks. And the sheep would be there, all tearing around, giving birth to young lambs in May.

5)

A new master has now come in onto the land: upsetting, unsettling news. The people are leaving, their worldly goods all withered. They've not even a cow for the moor. Some were put to the rent; others were slaughtered. Only a bare few remain. And so what profit for me to stay on the land when I can't earn a thing from the shoes.

6)

So I'll go overseas. I shall follow the rest, try and find ourselves a place to live. We'll get new land, to be bought from ground up, and not owe a penny on it. Better for us the shelter of trees than any heathery banks facing out towards Gròbain. On cold, barren flagstones, when the cold would come in, that is one endless long moor.

7)

Mother Mary, we stayed so long on the land. And though we managed to make enough to survive, so much misfortune and loss overcame it in time and was scattered into mountain

mist. Though we'd go to the sales; though we'd sell off a herd; though we'd get a good enough price; still the Factor comes round, with his hard paper summons, and strips us of every last bit.

8)

That's one joyless raven we've been landed with now as Factor in place of MacLeod: a cruel, arrogant dolt, and no love lost for the people; no compassion, no pity, no mercy. Hardly surprising he's single under the sun; I have no clue who knows him. Except for the red-headed Campbell from North Assynt; may his kind live long!

9)

But if you ever go back overseas, say farewell to my family, my friends; and invite them to clear off, away from the rents, and come as soon as they should. For if they found the time, and some way to get over, then they'd be no longer beholden to MacDonald. Instead they could find a place and plant crops where potatoes and barley would flourish.

10)

We now live in an Island of plenty. And what we plant comes to flower. Oats grow, wheat ripens, with turnip, cabbage and beans. There's sugar from trees, free for the taking, in great heaps. And fresh, coloured, red rum in every cabin and shop, as abundant as water is drunk.



